



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Asian Elephant Conservation Fund

The Asian elephant, seen in zoos and circuses throughout the world, is more familiar to the average U.S. citizen than its more famous, large tusked African cousin. Nevertheless, in the wild, this species is much more endangered than its African counterpart. Only 35,000 to 45,000 Asian elephants survive in the wild, while African elephants, though also threatened, number ten times as many.

The Asian elephant shares a land mass with some of the densest and poorest human populations in the world. The pressure brought on by these conditions has resulted in the conversion of forest cover to agriculture and villages, fragmenting elephant habitat and populations. It is believed there are only 10 Asian elephant populations in the 13 range countries (India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, China, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam,

Malaysia, and Indonesia) that contain more than 1,000 elephants. Half of these are in India. The remaining populations are small, generally less than 100 elephants each, and some with lone bulls.

A growing threat is increased poaching of Asian elephants. Unlike African elephants, whose numbers have been decimated by rampant poaching for their ivory, Asian elephants have not traditionally been threatened by this act. This is due to females being tuskless and only 60 percent of the males having tusks. Recent trends in India indicate that ivory trade, which had more or less declined to minimal levels by 1990, revived in the mid 1990s, operating largely to smuggle raw or semi-worked ivory. A shortage of data from most range countries makes estimation of poaching levels a difficult exercise.



Asian elephant
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In 1997, Congress passed the Asian Elephant Conservation Act, establishing the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund (Fund), to address some of the varied problems facing this species' survival. The Fund provides assistance through a competitive grants program designed to develop projects with government and non-governmental organizations, local communities, academic institutions, and other interested parties to increase their ability to manage Asian elephant habitats, support surveys and monitoring, educate local communities, and increase anti-poaching efforts. During 1999 and 2000, the Service received 60 proposals and awarded 29 grants totaling \$1,196,500. This effort leveraged a 1:1 match of in-kind support and additional funds.

The following projects provide a sample of contributions made by the Fund for the continued survival of the Asian elephant.

Historical information suggests that Cambodia once supported large elephant populations, and preliminary surveys suggest that some 500-1,000 elephants may still exist there in the wild. The Fund supported two projects to ensure their long-term survival. Collaboration between the Service, World Wide Fund for Nature, Wildlife Conservation Society, and Fauna and Flora International united efforts to assist Cambodian authorities with assessing elephant population numbers, training 12 Cambodian biologists in elephant ecology and monitoring, developing a National Elephant Management Plan, and preparing a Khmer language text in elephant ecology.

The largest population of Asian elephants in Indonesia is on the island of Sumatra. Sumatra is under pressure from continued unsustainable logging practices; conversion of forested areas to agricultural use; economic collapse; forest fires; and immigration. The effect on elephants has been fragmentation and reduction of habitat, and the division of elephant populations into smaller units. Some of these smaller units are at risk of being lost from the effects of inbreeding. The

Fund supported a multifaceted project focused on reducing conflict with humans using captive elephants, promoting centers for the collection of conservation-related information on wild elephant populations, and increasing quality of life for captive elephants while keeping them as part of the already depleted Sumatran elephant gene pool.

Recognizing that the threat to the Asian elephant has been grossly underestimated in relation to its African cousin, the Fund supported a project with the Wildlife Protection Society of India to: collect accurate information on poaching and illegal ivory trade by documenting, analyzing, and monitoring changes and trends of poaching practices; provide technical assistance, advice, and information to governmental authorities for improved law enforcement measures in protected areas; and to supply information to stimulate support for the long-term survival of the Asian elephant.

In an attempt to broaden awareness regarding Asian elephants and their conservation needs, the Fund collaborated with the Centre for Environmental Education in India to develop an educational package and train more than 450 teachers. This helped them create awareness projects and campaigns for children 10-14 years of age; provided guidance in organizing a network of local groups for securing financial support for these awareness campaigns; and established two intensive education programs in more than 40 schools near protected areas with wild elephant populations.

In the Rajaji National Park, India, more than 440 elephants are at risk because of degradation of the forest due to the presence of nearly 5,000 Gujjar cattle herders inside the national park. The Fund partnered with Friends of the Doon Society to augment the current government program to relocate the Gujjars and their cattle outside the park, and provide educational and social welfare activities. With the Gujjars adopting new animal husbandry practices and relocating, the natural habitat of the park can be more effectively managed for the elephant population.

The border area between Burma and India shares one of the most important populations of elephants in Asia. The Fund provided a grant to the Aane Mane Foundation to survey forested areas along the border to detect elephant presence, status and threats to the population from capture for domestic use. The Burmese and Indian governments will use the information to help develop national action plans for the management of their elephants.

The Service invites submission of grant proposals for the conservation of the Asian elephant throughout its range, and supports projects that develop local ability to manage, conserve, research, or protect this species through provision of funding, training and equipment.

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